



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

ICE'S NATIONAL GANG CRACKDOWN REACHES 155 ARRESTS *Operation Community Shield Yields Results in North Carolina*

CHARLOTTE, N.C. - In testimony before Congress yesterday, Michael J. Garcia, Department of Homeland Security Assistant Secretary for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), announced that a national anti-gang initiative launched by ICE Feb. 23 has resulted in the arrest of more than 155 members of the violent street gang Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) in 19 U.S. cities.

At a hearing of the House Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Immigration, Border Security and Claims, Assistant Secretary Garcia provided lawmakers with the latest results of "Operation Community Shield," a nationwide ICE initiative to disrupt, dismantle, and prosecute violent gang members by employing the full range of authorities and investigative tools available to ICE.

Locally in North Carolina, ICE agents have arrested three individuals under Operation Community Shield. Among the three arrested was 30-year-old Jose Velasco, of Honduras and 17-year-old Jose Peralta-Morales, a citizen of Mexico.

Both Velasco and Peralta-Morales are charged with being in the country illegally. Velasco was previously convicted of larceny and Peralta-Morales was convicted of robbing a couple at gunpoint.

"Our message is clear: we will not tolerate gang violence and crime in our community," said Jeffrey S. Jordan, assistant special agent-in-charge for the Charlotte office. "We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners in our fight to get these dangerous criminals off our streets."

Operation Community Shield is a nationwide ICE initiative designed to disrupt and dismantle violent gang organizations and prosecute their members by employing the full range of authorities and investigative tools available to ICE. Under this initiative, ICE is employing its broad immigration authorities, both criminal and administrative, against gang members. At the same time, ICE uses its customs authorities to target narcotics smuggling and money laundering and to seek the forfeiture of assets.

Operation Community Shield draws on strong partnerships and cooperation with existing federal, state and local anti-gang efforts. Such partnerships are essentials to the success of the initiative and to ensure officer safety during operations.

Under Operation Community Shield, ICE has also taken several new steps to help other federal, state, and local agencies identify and target gang members. ICE's Law Enforcement Support Center (LESC) in Vermont is playing a critical role in this effort. The center is running MS-13 gang member data provided by state and local law enforcement agencies through various ICE and Homeland Security databases to help these agencies identify and locate violent gang members.

The law enforcement actions to date have been conducted in coordination with law enforcement at the federal, state and local levels. ICE will also be working through its 54 Attaché offices overseas to cooperate with foreign governments that are also experiencing gang problems, particularly those in Central America.

Assistant Secretary Garcia's testimony is posted on the Web at www.ice.gov.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.